

What to Look for

in a Quality, Literacy-Rich Preschool Learning Environment

Diversity: Children, teachers and materials reflect the cultural, linguistic and ability diversity of North Carolina. In a classroom of about 15 children, 3 would have identifiable disabilities. Children and families would come from “all walks of life.”

Inclusion: All children would be able to participate in classroom activities with adequate supports and adaptations. Make sure that all children can see, hear and use books, writing instruments and computers. Support development of home language use by having bi-lingual staff and knowing key phrases in all language spoken by the families of the children in the classroom.

Family participation: Create meaningful opportunities for family involvement by talking with families about their concerns, ideas, and priorities. Develop partnerships with families where schools and families play equal roles in the children’s education. **Programs that offer home visits often report better relationships with families. Family partnerships equal better outcomes.**

Interaction and engagement: The most important aspect of a preschool learning environment is the positive and consistent interactions among children and adults and children. Adults should engage children in real conversations every day. All children should be communicating and actively engaged in meaningful activities throughout the day. Open-ended questions and comments should predominate; for example, “Tell me about your drawing,” “How did you name that book?” and “How did you make that book?”

Print-rich Environment: Meaningful print, e.g., children’s work, current poems and songs, and print that is actually used should be displayed at children’s eye-level. Alphabet books, story books, and informational texts books that are related to the theme of each learning center should be displayed and used in that center. Printed materials should be in English and in children’s home languages and used for functional purposes.

Literate role models: Adults model the use of print by following recipes, completing and following lists, writing down and posting what children say and do, giving children written comments on their play, ordering from a menu in the pretend restaurant or shopping from a list in a pretend grocery store.

Accessible literacy materials: Laminated books, page “fluffers,” adapted crayon holders, sign language and communication boards/devices can make literacy materials accessible. Make sure all children can use literacy-related materials and that they have some way to communicate while reading, drawing, writing, telling and acting out stories.

Ongoing observations: Teachers make notes of what children are doing and saying, keep samples of children’s writings and drawings and take pictures/videos of children’s play in order to document children’s development over time.

Reading and writing: Do it everywhere, everyday, all of the time. Paper, chalk boards, white boards and accessible writing instruments are readily accessible to children in every center (and outdoors) so that they can make signs, write notes, draw pictures about what they are doing and communicate messages to others.



References and Resources

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North Carolina Resources: Visit the North Carolina Preschool Demonstration Programs to see effective practices at work. Visit <http://www.ncsip.org>, <http://www.med.unc.edu/ahs/clds/> and http://www.osr.nc.gov/_pdf/DPIDemoPreschoolProgramCombined.pdf for more information.

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A Guide for Administrators, Teachers and Families

CENTER on Literacy

In addition to conventional objects found in a preschool classroom, this list is a non-exhaustive compilation of items available to all children in a literacy-rich environment. Printed items should reflect different languages. Pictures and communication symbols with associated words should be displayed in all areas for children not currently communicating all that they can through speech. Books and writing and drawing instruments should be adapted for children with physical and sensory impairments. These items are supportive of literacy-learning ONLY if adults model, use, and talk about what they and the children are doing.

Greeting Area

- Sign-in area for children to find their names/ pictures, write, or otherwise indicate that they have arrived
- Classroom news- what are we working on, special events
- Family information- pictures, notes to parents
- Labeled space for each child's belongings
- “Me Museum” displaying labeled artifacts of the child featured for a special time
- “Question of the Day” chart for children to respond by writing their names, putting a counter in a jar, etc.

Group Meeting Area

- Chore charts
- Lunch and snack menus
- Featured books of interest
- Classroom rules and promises
- Classroom schedule
(*picture and written forms*)
- ABC/ logo/word wall
- Children's dictionaries

Outdoors

- Outdoor easel with paint, markers
- Picture symbols available for children to indicate a choice of outdoor activities or that they are hot, thirsty, etc
- Books showing children playing outside
- Stop sign and other directionality signs, logos
- Written/pictured scavenger hunts
- Accessible paper, white boards, chalk boards and writing/drawing instruments, including sidewalk chalk for children to
 - make signs for their pretend play
 - make signs about their building projects
 - chart outdoor science projects like plant growth and bird watching
 - develop projects

Art/Creativity Center:

- Writing pads, whiteboards, paper
- Pencils, crayons, markers
- Non-conventional art instruments - cut up food (*such as potato shapes*), dish washing sponges, netting materials, combs
- Written/pictured directions/suggestions to follow
- Books, postcards, and pictures of famous paintings and artists
- Playdough alphabet stampers



Dramatic Play Center (Housekeeping)

- Teacher-and-child made cookbooks and recipe cards
- Empty food and other product containers with labels and logos on them
- Telephone books
- Writing pads, whiteboards, paper
- Pencils, crayons, markers, checkbooks, credit cards
- Envelopes, stamps, stationary, mailbox
- Filing cabinet, file folders
- Thematically related children's books
(*e.g., post office, zoo, airport, restaurants*)
- Shopping bags, coupons
- Magazines, newspapers, television guides
- Tickets (*e.g., movie, play, airplane*)
- Print items children bring in from their home experiences (*e.g., cards, letters*)

Woodworking Center

- Writing pads, whiteboards, paper
- Pencils, crayons, markers
- Written picture directions for children to follow
- Books related to wood working

Block Center

- Tape, cardboard (*all shapes/sizes*)
- Blocks covered in plain paper
- Writing pads, whiteboards, paper
- Pencils, crayons, markers
- Books and pictures of buildings, highways, farms
- Blocks with ABCs or storybook characters on them
- Blocks with different sound makers inside of them
- Yellow construction/caution tape
- Work in progress signs
- Miniature dolls/people of various cultures, ages and abilities

Writing Center

- Computer and appropriate exploratory software, printer
- Typewriter
- Journals
- Rubber stamps and ink pads
- All kinds of paper
- All kinds of pencils, pens, markers, chalk
- Clipboards
- Envelopes, stationary, postage stamps, address labels, name tags
- Junk mail, email
- Staples, stapler, paper clips, hole punchers, stamp punchers, tape, rulers
- Sandpaper letters
- Individual mail boxes for children to write notes and for parents to send in notes to their children

Reading Center

- Check-out library cards and system to use them
- All kinds of books- story books, non-fiction, poetry and wordless picture books displayed so that all children can see the covers and access and use each book
- Books on tape, labeled with the book names
- Tape recorders for children to record their own stories
- Book cover display



Science Center

- Charts and diagrams reflecting children's preferences, thoughts, ideas
- Simple written/picture directions for children to follow for science experiments
- Books related to items in the science area (*insects, fish, leaves*)
- Writing pads, whiteboards, paper, clipboards
- Pencils, crayons, markers
- Rulers, string, tape
- Thermometers

Music Center

- Song books
- Movement, instrument charts
- Writing pads, whiteboards, paper, pencils, crayons, markers to write songs, make “favorites” charts, record movement/dances
- Videos of songs with words shown on the screen
- Karaoke machine or microphone for children to sing with amplification and/or word cues

Snack/Eating Area

- Menus, school menus for lunch
- Notes from parents in children's lunch bags or to be put on lunch trays
- Charts for children to indicate favorite foods and preferences
- Paper and pencils for teachers and children to write grocery lists
- Names of children, addresses, phone numbers, etc. to indicate seat placement

Bathroom/Wash Area

- Picture symbols for reminders of correct sequence to wash hands
- Potty chart
- Books (*if permitted*)
- Posters, poems, etc. on walls and ceilings
(*if permitted*)

EVERYWHERE — You should see children's drawings, scribbles, writings with written dictation of what the children said and did while creating their work; photographs of children and families with captions describing what is happening in the pictures; child-made books and clearly labeled areas, shelves, drawers, containers in print/pictures/symbols in English and other languages. **Adults modeling, using, and talking about all of the above!**